

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for tracking through a carrier distribution system a mail item created by a sender, the method comprising the steps of:
 - inducting the mail item into the carrier distribution system, the mail item having thereon a unique sender generated identifier;
 - obtaining the unique sender generated identifier from the mail item during processing of the mail item in the carrier distribution system;
 - assigning a unique carrier generated identifier to the mail item;
 - associating the unique sender generated identifier with the unique carrier generated identifier;
 - the carrier tracking the location of the mail item through the carrier distribution system using the unique carrier generated identifier;
 - and
 - allowing the sender to obtain location information about the mail item using the unique sender generated identifier without the sender having knowledge of the unique carrier generated identifier.
2. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising applying the unique carrier generated identifier to the mail item.
3. The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising applying the unique carrier generated identifier in a bar code form.

4. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the unique sender generated identifier is in a bar code form.

5. The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the mail item has a recipient address printed thereon and the unique sender generated identifier is located on the mail item proximate the recipient address and further comprising using the unique sender generated identifier for locating the recipient address.

6. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the unique sender generated identifier includes an address and further comprising the carrier obtaining the address from the unique sender generated identifier and supplying to the address information about the location of the mail item.

7. The method as recited in claim 6, wherein the address is one of an e-mail address, a pager number, and a facsimile machine number.

8. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the unique sender generated identifier includes an electronic address and additional data that uniquely identifies the mail item.

9. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising uniquely associating the unique sender generated and unique carrier generated identifiers by storing them in a file.

10. The method as recited in claim 9, further comprising reading the unique carrier generated identifier at a plurality of locations throughout the carrier distribution system, storing in the file a date stamp, a time stamp, and a location identifier each time the reading of the unique carrier generated identifier occurs, and associating in the file the date stamp, time stamp, and location identifier with the unique carrier generated identifier and the unique sender generated identifier.

11. A carrier distribution system for tracking a mail item having a unique sender generated identifier thereon, the carrier distribution system comprising:

means for reading the unique sender generated identifier from the mail item;

means for including a unique carrier generated identifier on the mail item;

a data base that associates the unique sender generated identifier with the unique carrier generated identifier;

at least one sensor that reads the unique carrier generated identifier from the mail item and provides location information to the data base that is associated with the unique carrier generated identifier so that at times when the carrier distribution system receives a location query from an entity about the mail item via submission of the unique sender generated identifier the location information is obtainable from the database without requiring submission of the unique carrier generated identifier by the entity.

12. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the means for reading is an automatic facer/canceler.

13. A system as recited in claim 12, wherein the unique carrier generated identifier is printed in a bar code form.

14. A system as recited in claim 12, wherein the unique sender generated identifier is in a bar code form.

15. A system as recited in claim 14, wherein the mail item has a recipient address printed thereon and the unique sender generated identifier is located on the mail item proximate the recipient address and the advanced facer/canceler detects the unique sender generated identifier and uses such detection for locating the recipient address.

16. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the unique sender generated identifier includes an address and the means for reading obtains the address from the unique sender generated identifier and supplies to the address an indication that the mail item has been read at the means for reading.

17. A system as recited in claim 16, wherein the address is one of an e-mail address, a pager number, and a facsimile machine number.

18. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the unique sender generated identifier includes an electronic address and additional data that uniquely identifies the mail item.

19. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the location information includes a date stamp, a time stamp, and a location identifier.

20. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the unique sender generated identifier includes an indication of the type of premium service that is requested for the mail item.

21. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the means for including is a printer.